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George Jeffreys: Pentecostal and Contemporary Implications

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Received: 19 January 2018; Accepted: 2 February 2018; Published: 15 February 2018

Abstract: The life and work of the Welsh evangelist George Jeffreys resulted in the planting of two denominations in the UK between 1915 and 1962, when he died. The Elim churches continue to this day to be one of the larger classical Pentecostal denominations in the UK, while the Bible Pattern Fellowship dispersed on Jeffreys' death. The disputes that led to Jeffreys' departure from Elim were said to have arisen from his adherence to British Israel doctrine, though his supporters believed they arose from his championing of local church ownership and democracy. This paper considers sociological and other reasons for Jeffreys' remarkable success in the interwar years and his eventual departure from a denomination he founded. It concludes by reflecting on topics (such as the importance of debate and law) that have relevance for contemporary Pentecostalism.

Keywords: George Jeffreys; Elim; British Israel; schism; Pentecostalism; revivalism; 1930s

1. Introduction

George Jeffreys (1889–1962) has been called the greatest British evangelist since John Wesley and George Whitfield (Cartwright 2002, p. 808). Unlike the other two, he self-identified as a Pentecostal. He preached throughout the British Isles during his adult life and planted the Elim Pentecostal denomination, which continues to flourish to this day.

While the analysis of historical causation is fundamentally problematic, given the interaction between indeterminate human agency and social and cultural factors that can be theorised according to a variety of positions, this paper will outline the stages in the life of Jeffreys and end by adducing possible causes of his successes and failures, some of which utilise sociological theory.

While the 'great man' notion of history has been criticised (Butterfield 1949, p. 7), it is evident that, in the case of the creation of an organisation from nothing, the originator must be the chief cause of its existence. Without Jeffreys, there would have been no Elim, since it is impossible to believe a movement of its type would have arisen spontaneously or through the variable effects of culture. In speaking of Jeffreys, we have three main sources of information: his own statements, the statements of those who knew him, and what he did. We may be able to infer traces of his inner life with reference to his position within a particular social group at a particular point in time (e.g., in his attitude to debt), but, equally, we may be wrong in making these inferences, since Jeffreys was atypical, as is borne out by the remarkable achievements of his life.

2. First Strides

Born into a bilingual Welsh-English coal mining family in Wales in the Victorian era, Jeffreys began with the psychological advantage of a stable home coupled with economic sufficiency; his father and elder brothers were all employed at the upper level of wages earned by manual workers.

The independent chapel (one of many dotted all over Wales) was a fixed point in the family's existence, and they would regularly attend on a Sunday and would have heard preaching of a high standard (in Welsh) (Tudor Jones 2004, p. 188), as well as becoming musically attuned to the specialities of male voice choirs with or without an accompanying band.

Jeffreys' maternal grandfather had been a Baptist minister, and Jeffreys himself, as a boy, was taken by his father to see a phrenologist, an indication that his father considered him to be a promising or unusual child (Cartwright 1986, p. 2). His father died when Jeffreys was seven years old. If there is a steely earnestness about the young Jeffreys, this may be attributable to his father's early death.

He attended school until the age of 12, and was then sent to work down the coal mine. He therefore received no further education beyond what was offered at primary level and, from what we know of him later, took few steps to educate himself widely apart from devotional reading of Scripture and a few theological texts. As far as we know, he never attended a cinema or read novels or secular history. Lack of education should not be confused with lack of ability, since those who knew him as an adolescent testified to his capability (Boulton 1928, p. 11).

In 1904–1905, a religious revival swept through the Welsh valleys and mining towns, and Jeffreys himself, together with his older brother Stephen, attended these chaotic gatherings and, at one of them, made a lasting evangelical commitment to Christ. He and his brother threw their lives into their revived chapel, attended and testified at open-air meetings, and observed the excited crowds and religious fervour all around them. Shortly afterwards, Jeffreys received a Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit and spoke with other tongues (Kay 2017, p. 41). Through his preaching, he began to exchange a mining environment for the life of a nonconformist minister, but one, as he confessed, handicapped by a Pentecostal experience that closed doors to him within the Baptist and Congregationalist churches. Nevertheless, because he had earlier experienced healing from facial paralysis (Jeffreys 1932, p. 57), he began to pray for sick people within the network of chapels near his home and, by the time he was about 20, had established himself as a compelling evangelical preacher whose exercise of charismatic gifts of healing often filled the buildings where he spoke.

Around 1913, Jeffreys was invited to Ireland and sailed for Belfast, arriving with a vague plan to evangelise the whole island using a band of preachers possibly modelled on John Wesley's early Methodist circuits.¹ Tent meetings were held continuously in the summer months, and in the winter months he hired town halls. Irish culture was religious and nationalistic, and frequent church attendance sustained the Catholic/Protestant divide with its concomitant republicanism and unionism. After the declaration of war in the fateful summer of 1914, Jeffreys, now ordained, was exempt from military conscription and pressed forward with evangelism to the extent that he formed 15 new Irish Pentecostal congregations in the period from 1915 to 1920.² He was solving the problem of finding a denomination in which to minister by creating his own, and was solidifying his evangelical and Pentecostal theology around the person of Christ.

During his final years in Ireland, he was influenced by John Leech, a high-ranking lawyer, to adopt British Israel (or BI) doctrine. This averred that the 10 lost tribes of the house of Israel had somehow made their way across Europe to the British Isles, including Ireland, in the period after the fall of Samaria in 722 BC. The consequence of this doctrine was that the British people were descended from those Jewish exiles, and it was this which explained the extraordinary success of the British Empire and, indeed, of the economic prosperity of the United States. The promises of Scripture addressed to Israel had been divinely worked out in the lives of the British people and their American cousins. This doctrine made no impact upon Jeffreys' evangelical preaching (since he explicitly believed salvation was by grace, not race) but was to have later contentious consequences.

¹ *Confidence* 8.8 (August 1915), p. 156 suggests this.

² Conscription was not introduced until 1916 and, in any case, was enforced in Ireland less well than in the rest of the UK.

After a woman had left a property to Jeffreys to help fund his evangelistic work, the woman's family challenged the bequest, and the tussle that followed made Jeffreys realise he needed to set up a legally recognised vehicle that would allow for the receipt of gifts and other money (Cartwright 1986, p. 46). Here Leech, with his lawyer's brain, was invaluable. Quite quickly, Articles of Association or similar documents were drafted, and the Elim Evangelistic Band was formally created with its own council headed by Jeffreys (Kay 2017, p. 79). These developments, then, were prompted by Jeffreys by practical necessity.

While considering his future, it became evident that civil unrest in Ireland would prevent evangelisation of the republican and Roman Catholic south. Jeffreys dropped his plans for an all-Ireland denomination. Instead, he prepared to transfer from Belfast to London.

3. Systematic Growth

In Ireland, Jeffreys had learned how to build up a series of interconnected congregations within a single legal framework, which became the nucleus of a new denomination. He was to extend the same principles to the rest of the United Kingdom, starting in London. However, there was a further important theological incentive to his strategy. In 1917, the British army, under the command of General Allenby, had captured Jerusalem from the Ottoman Empire, with the result that the holy sites of the Bible were now free from Islamic control and, more than this, were included by international mandate within the care of the British Empire. Jeffreys believed this unexpected turn of events correlated with biblical eschatology in the sense that Jerusalem was no longer 'trodden down of the Gentiles' (Lk 21:24) and that 'this generation' (Lk 21:32) would live to see the return of Christ. Both British Israel teaching and Adventism were strengthened by the success of the British Army and, when the Balfour Declaration (1917) stating the British government's willingness to favour the Holy Land as a Jewish home was added to the picture, world events appeared to have been divinely engineered. Jeffreys certainly thought so.

In 1921, Jeffreys hired an almost redundant church building in the south of London for his opening manoeuvres and preached every day for several weeks, with evangelistic services in the evening and healing services on several afternoons. Starting with limited attendance, the momentum of the meetings rapidly built up once healings occurred. Word spread and, using the modernised London transport system with its underground trains and decommissioned military vehicles as buses, crowds could assemble from far and wide, which they did. By the end of the year, the rented building could be bought, and offices attached to the back for a headquarters for the substantial evangelistic work now in progress. Stephen Jeffreys assisted by holding his own healing campaigns, and for some years, the two brothers worked in tandem, with George as the visionary organiser and Stephen the frontline healing evangelist.

4. Reaching Across the Land (1920–1935)

So began about 15 years of consistent progress and Pentecostal expansion. Buying a car, Jeffreys would campaign regularly in large population centres, taking care to establish a base in Scotland similar to the one in London, and another in Wales. In each case, the method was the same, and in each case, the method was met with evangelistic and congregational success. Congregations were formed, buildings were bought, sometimes outright, and the crowds continued to attend even when he stayed for three weeks or more in the same city. Behind Jeffreys' preaching charisma stood E.J. Phillips, a man of extraordinary industriousness and organisational skill, who managed the finances and logistics of the various burgeoning projects: a bible school, the paying of pastoral salaries, the funding of a magazine, the logistics of transporting equipment around the country, advertising, and myriad other practicalities such as the completing of Jeffreys' tax return. Placed in front of the congregation, Jeffreys, with his lilting Welsh voice and dignified demeanour, could hold his listeners entranced for sermon after sermon. Almost invisible, and back at headquarters, Phillips took the administrative load.

Jeffreys began to follow an annual pattern of preaching in Belfast over Christmas, and then at the various large locations at the same time each year, including tent campaigns during the summer months on the south coast of England. In 1926, Amy Semple McPherson was on the way to the Holy Land and stopped off in the UK. Jeffreys and Phillips decided to invite her to preach for them and, realising the magnetic power of her name, took the bold step of hiring the Royal Albert Hall in London for the event. This was one of the iconic London venues, with a seating capacity of 10,000 people, a great pipe organ, and easily within reach of numerous transport links. The step was bold, because the cost of hiring the hall was high, but Phillips sprang into action by organising transport from Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the Channel Islands so that discounted tickets could be purchased and even whole trains could be hired. In this way, and from every corner of the UK, Jeffreys assembled the fruits of his evangelistic ministry at a single location, thereby giving the denomination a natural unity as well as a focus. Thereafter, he hired the Royal Albert Hall at Whitsun from 1927 until 1939, and every year he preached and filled it.

5. A Turning of the Tide

In 1932 and 1933, Jeffreys started to broach the doctrine of British Israelism with the rest of Elim. He did so openly by holding discussions with ministers, and he must have assumed that these ministers, many of whom he had placed as pastors over congregations, would loyally follow him down the BI road. Yet this was not so. Jeffreys had always upheld the authority of the Bible. Consequently, although Elim was thoroughly and proudly Pentecostal, it derived its distinctiveness from a commitment to the Bible, and the pastors simply did not find BI in the Scriptures.

At almost exactly the same time, the basic legal and constitutional structure of Elim was under review, and was eventually settled by the drawing up and signing of a Deed Poll, a 36-page document setting out the governance of the denomination. An Executive of nine men were to be put in place. Of these, two were *ex officio*, Jeffreys and Phillips, and Jeffreys himself was given the right for life to nominate three other members of the council. This would have given him a total of four votes out of nine, so that he only needed to find one other person to agree with him to secure a majority on every decision. By the Deed Poll, nearly all the valuable property accumulated by Elim was legally placed into the Executive's hands and, over and above this, it exerted spiritual authority through its influence on the annual ministerial conference and its oversight of church policy.

The administrative structure of Elim defined by its constitution was gradually adapted in response to the movement's numerical growth and its accumulation of property. In this sense, structural development resulted from an interaction between endogenous (the call and gifting of Jeffreys) and exogenous (practical responses to success) factors. The internal mutation of the movement was also reflected in the separate legal categories of church that had come into being, partly as a result of competition with the Assemblies of God, which started to grow quickly after 1924 by its ability to attract autonomous congregations into a kind of loose federation without strong central control. So Elim now arranged itself into an inner ring of centrally controlled churches and an outer ring of churches permitted an element of autonomy.

As Jeffreys' energetic campaigning took him up and down the country, congregations were grouped into regions with their own superintendents. As Jeffreys spent less time in his London base, a weekly magazine was published to keep converts in touch with his latest successes. As more and more congregations were formed, more and more ministers were needed—a need met by residential training. Beyond this, missionaries were being sent overseas.

In essence, the administration of the movement complexified organically to cover its manifold activities and eventually settled into an annual cycle. Every year its unity was celebrated at the London gatherings in the Royal Albert Hall, and every year Jeffreys published a Christmas letter full of grateful reminiscences. Departments and regions were added without threatening stability.

At the 1934 annual ministerial conference, Jeffreys introduced a debate on British Israelism. He ensured that John Leech was present to speak in favour of the motion for BI, and he must have

assumed that the highly respected advocate would wipe the floor with any opposition brave enough to disagree with him. The Elim minister in charge of training was put up to present the anti-BI case but, at the last moment, withdrew, and this left the task to E.J. Phillips, who stayed up all night to prepare his address. The meeting was conducted as a formal debate with speakers on both sides who, after presentations for an hour or so, took questions from the floor. After this, the matter was decided by vote. Phillips, who was of Jewish extraction himself, considered BI to be 'an infatuation'—he did not even dignify the idea by calling it a theory. The Elim ministers voted resoundingly against BI and only those in the immediate Jeffreys circle supported it.³ Courtesies were observed, Elim appeared to have overcome this doctrinal contest, and that should have been the end of the matter.

6. Travels and Crises

The BI issue appeared to have been resolved. Jeffreys continued his campaigning in 1935 with his eye upon coming-of-age celebrations in 1936 in the denomination's 21st year. Elim hired the Crystal Palace, an immense exhibition structure with a capacity for 20,000 people, for a vast London autumn event. During 1935, Jeffreys and his party took a five-week holiday to the Holy Land, starting at the pyramids in Egypt and then travelling northward. Jeffreys himself was stirred as he sat upon the Mount of Olives meditating upon the vicissitudes of the city over which Christ had wept. He was heartened at the same time by meeting citizens of Jerusalem who had been present in 1917 at Allenby's victorious entrance, and heard of the flowers being thrown over the soldiers and the grateful crowds kissing their hands. He foresaw British soldiers defending Jerusalem prior to the Battle of Armageddon, and his Adventist convictions deepened.

He returned to Britain, but with less focus on breaking new evangelistic ground. He now devoted much of his energy to raising money for a big Jubilee Fund intended to pay off all the debts on all the buildings as rapidly as possible.⁴ He went privately to see Phillips to speak about his desire to lay down the burden of leading Elim and set up an alternative charity, the World Revival Crusade, as a vehicle for his future work. During regular summer trips to France and Switzerland, he had seen plentiful conversions, though without forming any new congregations there.

As part of his drive to pay off debt, he proposed dividing the Elim churches into two sections, the best and most prosperous led by experienced pastors in a 'Jubilee Concentration', and the rest in a 'Forward Movement'. This division alarmed the Executive, who saw in the proposal, and in the setting up of the World Revival Crusade, an ulterior motive. They believed Jeffreys was preparing to take churches out of Elim into a new denomination that would be open to British Israel teaching. Nothing Jeffreys did over the next two or three years disabused the Executive of this interpretation of his actions. Jeffreys himself, in a turn diametrically opposed to the assumptions of the Deed Poll, now thundered from the pulpit on the evils of centralisation and the merits of autonomous congregations owning their own buildings.

In December 1937, Jeffreys collapsed with diabetes while, extraordinarily, E.J. Phillips, with tuberculosis, was also confined to hospital. Jeffreys recovered faster and, seizing the administrative reins, called for radical reform.⁵ He told the movement that he had received a divine command to 'set his house in order' and that this command entailed a dismantling of the central administration of property to enable congregations to become self-governing and free of what he came to denounce as 'Babylonish control'. Alarm in executive circles reached a new level, since Jeffreys had spent much time in 1936 touring the churches as part of the Jubilee year; he appeared to be strengthening his bonds with them in preparation for a call to secede.

³ By 73 to 17 votes, with 41 neutrals.

⁴ Working-class families like the one from which Jeffreys came had a horror of debt of any kind.

⁵ By implication, Phillips had failed to manage the movement's finances competently. Phillips had no difficulty, once he returned to the office, in showing Jeffreys had failed to read the accounts properly.

7. A Parting of the Ways

The Executive attempted to contain their differences with Jeffreys and come to an amicable settlement. In speaking about the decision-making of the conference, Jeffreys demanded a place for lay members. This was presented as a democratising measure, although it may also be seen as introducing men and women who would be more susceptible than ministers to Jeffreys' charisma. The stand-off between Jeffreys and Elim continued at the 1938 conference, and then also in 1939. Each time, Jeffreys was pushing for further changes that gave opportunities for BI teaching to be introduced or for the central control exercised by the conference or Executive to be reduced. He wanted the locally governed churches to be open to a new emphasis. Multipage documents and lengthy discussions filled the conference agenda but, despite concessions over doctrinal safeguards and the democratic rights granted to the conference or to each individual congregation, Jeffreys was never satisfied.

He eventually resigned in 1939 and then, after strenuous attempts at reconciliation over the course of a year, re-joined and finally resigned permanently in 1940. The question of the ownership of the buildings was at the forefront of the fusillade of pamphlets that then were exchanged between the Executive and Jeffreys. He wrote about 20, and Elim a slightly lower number in reply. Jeffreys took the role of the champion of ecclesiastical liberty, while the Executive pointed out that the system of which Jeffreys was so critical was one he had himself shaped and signed into law only a few years earlier.

Jeffreys set up an entirely new organisation, separate from the World Revival Crusade, called the Bible Pattern Fellowship, with its own magazine, conference, constitution, congregations and mode of operation. It was founded almost exactly at the start of the Second World War, and although Jeffreys anticipated large numbers of Elim churches would cross the divide to join his new group, the actual number that went over was relatively small. During 1938, 1939 and 1940, Elim ministers had begun to realise what was happening. They had actually suffered considerably during the drive to reduce Elim's debt, since what effectively occurred was that money was taken away from ministers to pay off buildings. Until that point, churches with a surplus income found their money being redirected through headquarters to churches whose pastors were insufficiently paid; the centralised system ensured a uniform pay scale for pastors. However, once the big demand for the Jubilee clearance of debt was made, surplus money went to pay down mortgages, and many ministers suffered hardship. It was this, perhaps, as much as anything else, that hardened the ministers against the demands Jeffreys was making for reform.

When Jeffreys left, Elim's shock and sadness was added to the trauma of a new war: young men donned military uniform and left home and the bombing of London began. Crusades could hardly be held, and travel was hampered by blackouts and the bombing of railway lines. The loss of their star preacher hurt, while, as the stream of pamphlets showed, Jeffreys remained for several years fixated on the minutiae of the rift. He made matters worse by periodically mailing Elim church officers with letters that had the effect of unsettling the pastors. Jeffreys eventually built up the Bible Pattern Fellowship to about 60 congregations, while Elim, after a few bare years, held steady and eventually found a new national evangelist in Percy Brewster and fresh hope.

When the war ended, Jeffreys could resume extensive travel and continued to attract crowds, but was unable to sustain long campaigns, with the result that he hardly formed any fresh congregations. He remained on the fringes of the British and European Pentecostal movements and complained of the formation of a World Pentecostal Conference after 1947. When he died in 1962, the Bible Pattern Fellowship largely dispersed; some congregations returned to Elim, and others migrated to the Assemblies of God.

8. Analysis

While it is impossible to conduct a precise empirical analysis of historical events, it is possible to review the growth of the Elim denomination (206 churches in 1942)⁶ and the departure of Jeffreys from it by making use of theological or sociological ideas. It is also possible to classify these ideas according to their exogenous or endogenous nature.

8.1. Growth of Elim

(A) Worldview: The most common explanation for the growth of Pentecostalism, and one that is consonant with secularisation theory, is that Pentecostalism is most readily appreciated in those cultures that best match the Pentecostal worldview. Since that worldview contains angels, spirits and an interventionist God, the notion here is that any culture that has not been subjected to the critique of the Enlightenment is likely to be hospitable to Pentecostalism. Given that secularisation theory assumes religion declines as the world becomes less 'enchanted', the idea that Pentecostal churches grow when there is a match between their worldview and the prevalent culture is effectively another way of expressing secularisation theory (Weber 1918 (1946)).

Thus, in the case of Jeffreys, the view would be expressed that he appealed to latent folk religion or unsophisticated and uneducated working people who would be prone to accepting his proclamation of a supernaturalist worldview. There are, however, difficulties with accepting this conclusion, not least that many of the people who accepted Jeffreys' preaching (like John Leech) were by no means simple people. In addition, Jeffreys was absolutely insistent that the gospel message he preached was supernatural from start to finish. He viewed Christianity as an entirely supernatural religion, all the way from the virgin birth to the resurrection, and with plentiful miracles in all the years of the ministry of Christ. So for Jeffreys, the gospel he preached was countercultural, or at least countercultural in respect of the main orientation of the larger churches, Anglican and Roman Catholic (Hastings 1986). Indeed, Jeffreys fought his battle on two fronts by berating the 'liberals', who denied the miraculous nature of Christianity, and the 'dispensationalists', who accepted the authority of Scripture but relegated miracles to the age of the Apostles.

Yet it is reasonable to argue for consonance between Jeffreys' preaching and the political culture of the day. In Ireland before 1920, his message resonated with a strongly anti-Catholic and pro-Protestant culture, whereas in England, his message resonated with the sense of morbidity and crisis that lay behind the thought of the cultural elite. Winston Churchill had written a book entitled *The World Crisis* (published in 1923) and, in an era where most families had been horribly bereaved by the mass slaughter of the First World War, there was morbidity in the air to the extent that one writer spoke of a 'morbid age' (Overy 2009). War appeared to be a concomitant of modern life, an inescapable blight on the human race brought about by the repressions of civilisation. This was a Freudian view (Freud 1930). Accompanying it was the shocked recognition that an ancient Christian monarchy in Russia had fallen prey to an atheistic and communist coup. Thus, when Jeffreys spoke about crisis, tragedy and end times, he was tapping into the unconscious fears of many people and, when he added on top of these fears a biblical layer of interpretation speaking of Antichrist, Armageddon and persecution, he was striking yet another unseen chord.

(B) Preaching: It has been argued that evangelical preaching is attractive to an audience confused by current events or moral dilemmas. Such preaching, it is said, oversimplifies complex issues and, in doing so, gains a spurious authority (Kelley 1972; Innaccone et al. 1995). The notion here is that evangelical preaching, as opposed to more liberal preaching, is forceful, definite and demanding. Its clarity provokes a response, whereas liberal preaching, which is exploratory, tentative and questioning, has no such effect.

⁶ According to Wilson (1961, p. 57), Elim had reached 152 churches in England, 8 in Scotland, 26 in Ireland, 17 in Wales and 3 in the Channel Islands by 1942.

This argument applies to the preaching of Jeffreys in that he undoubtedly achieved clarity and force in his sermons. Whether it is valid to argue that Jeffreys' success entirely stems from the definiteness of his preaching is questionable. After all, there were other preachers in the conservative camp—some evangelical and others Pentecostal—who could equally be said to have thumped their pulpits and simplified the moral and spiritual choices in front of their listeners but without anything like the national success achieved by Jeffreys. Therefore, although the theory is attractive and may be partially correct, it falls short.

(C) Healing and miracles: In the first part of the 20th century, medical science was barely out of the Victorian age. It was primitive by today's standards, without antibiotics or much of the technology that assists contemporary diagnosis and treatment. Britain itself had no National Health Service (or health care system funded out of taxation), an innovation only brought in after 1945. Moreover, understanding of diet was undeveloped. As a consequence, the population was relatively unhealthy—there were also cases of tuberculosis as a consequence of poorly ventilated and unheated houses, and there were industrial accidents and disabled service members discharged from the Armed Forces. When a powerful preacher announced that Jesus is as much present today as he had been in times of the Bible, men and women were willing to believe and to receive prayer: healings undoubtedly occurred, as is confirmed by reports in the secular press. Jeffreys took these healings as a vindication of the supernaturalistic stance he had adopted. This combination of preaching that addressed the deep-seated fears of a population haunted by unemployment or war and miracles of healing was potent and attractive. It was, to use a term popularised fifty years later, 'power evangelism' (Wimber and Springer 1992), since it caused changes in the worldview of many listeners, and regular testimonies to this effect were published in the *Evangel*.

(D) Charisma: Max Weber offered an analysis and description of the rise of religious movements by postulating the presence of charisma in a new leader. He took the term from the New Testament but applied it beyond the sphere of religion. It described an individual endowed with particular gifts and skills that followers attributed to supernatural sources. The charismatic prophet offered a unified worldview for believers to hold and pursue (Schnepel 1987). Once the ground-breaking charismatic leader had established a new faith or a new spiritual path, the second generation of religious leaders would rapidly bureaucratise the cohort of followers and, by this means, build up religious institutions. This two-generation process of religious innovation could be observed in multiple locations and over several religious traditions. Illuminating though it was, it hardly constituted an explanation of the development of Elim. While some writers attempted to show the connection between charisma and institutionalisation, Weber's theory had no answer either psychological or sociological for the sudden and unexpected emergence of a charismatic personality (Eisenstadt 1968, chps. 19 and 20). In this respect, Weber discerned an observable pattern of events, rather than a causative theory. To say that Jeffreys was a charismatic individual is, in many respects, to state the obvious.

Where Weber's theory appears suspect in Jeffreys' case, however, is over the role of Phillips. Bryan Wilson, writing in the Weberian tradition about Elim, considered the disagreement between Jeffreys and Phillips as a classic example of the breakdown of relationships between the charismatic leader and a bureaucratic follower (Wilson 1961, p. 45). However, as the voluminous correspondence between Jeffreys and Phillips shows, the situation was not nearly so clear-cut or simple as this. Jeffreys was also a highly practical individual with the ability to function bureaucratically and administratively, while Phillips was a capable speaker (as his refutation of John Leech showed). The charismatic leader was an institution builder as well as a theologically driven and persuasive speaker.

8.2. The Schism

Sociological theory has also been concerned with religious groupings and the emergence of sects and their evolution into churches or denominations (Troeltsch 1912 (1931)). It is possible to see the departure of Jeffreys from Elim and his establishment of the Bible Pattern Fellowship as the formation of a new sect. One might view the successful Elim churches of the late 1930s as a wider religious

culture from which the sub-group schismatically escapes towards greater doctrinal purity; this would be in keeping with classical formulations offered by Weber and Troeltsch. Yet, such an interpretation of events is problematic because both groups, Elim and the Pattern Fellowship, accepted the same doctrine of salvation and the same holiness codes. This was not by any stretch of the imagination a replay of the emergence of early Pentecostal groups from their staid Baptist or Wesleyan parent bodies. Nor did it follow a call to embrace a new and truer message of salvation. The split occurred ostensibly over the matter of church government and the rights of a congregation to direct its own affairs and possess the building for which it has paid. British Israelism hangs like a shadow over the whole affair. Jeffrey's loyal followers maintained its irrelevance while those who remained in Elim disagreed.

There appear to be two main alternatives for understanding the split. First, it occurred because a respected leader performed a U-turn that the majority of his followers would not accept. In 1934, Jeffrey's was offering a centralised future, but by 1938 or 39, he had swung round to a decentralised future, a decentralisation intended to permeate the denomination and all its local churches. Second, it occurred because Jeffrey's had become obsessed by British Israel doctrine as the international situation darkened, and Elim members and ministers, together with other evangelical churches, believed the doctrine was foolish and untrue.

It is reasonable to ask why Jeffrey's ratcheted up his support for BI. He presented it to the Elim conference as a legitimate eschatological variant at a time when Pentecostal eschatology accepted a range of positions on the rapture of the church and the 'great tribulation' (Mt 24:21). He affirmed that the book of Revelation's seven churches could be interpreted as prophetically figurative of the centuries of church history or merely limited to the early second century. In his defence of BI, Jeffrey's demanded the right to preach whichever eschatological scheme he wished and he, for his part, accepted others would preach other schemes. However, this still does not answer the question of why Jeffrey's found it so important to preach BI doctrine when he knew it to be controversial and had already discovered its unacceptability to the great majority of Elim pastors. There appears to be no obvious sociological reason for this, and there is little support for the notion that BI became more attractive as dictatorships in European countries in the 1930s ramped up their political and military power. It is true that the Pattern magazine in the early 1940s carried articles written by members of the British Israel Federation who dogmatically asserted that Britain could not and would not lose the war and would never be invaded by a foreign power. British Israelism offered an ideology that helped its followers cope with the dangers of bombing and the threat of Nazi occupation. Yet, in the years from 1934 to 1939, Jeffrey's could not be sure war would break out. Indeed, his answer to the military escalation in Europe was to stress the need for revival in Britain: if revival occurred, God would save his people (Kay 2017, p. 307). So why did BI become so increasingly important to Jeffrey's? Two explanations remain: first, that Jeffrey's was excessively influenced by John Leech and, second, that Jeffrey's, lacking secondary education, was unable to critique BI doctrine. Both these explanations, however, are speculative, and it seems one can hardly blame Jeffrey's lack of education since many of the pastors whom he appointed, and who rejected BI, were similarly short of formal schooling.

9. A Conclusion Pointing Forward

From 1934, when the Deed Poll was signed until the faltering end of the dispute between Jeffrey's and Elim, constitutional and legal realities shaped events. The law of the land and the denomination's constitutional documents dominated the way the protagonists fought. Gone were the easy fraternal days in 1915 in Ireland or the lively scenes of revival. Instead, because property was involved, but also as a result of the mindset of Jeffrey's and Phillips, the debate became rational-legal rather than spiritual-expressive. Here is a conundrum for successful property-owning denominations which began in a flurry of evangelical enthusiasm. Valuable assets (usually buildings) are protected by contracts and insurances that in a liberal democracy cannot be set aside. Modern Pentecostal movements in nations that allow freehold ownership of property and settle disputes in courts of law are bound to rely on these rights—and so they should—for nothing comparable exists in feudal societies or under

communistic totalitarian regimes. The question for Pentecostals to answer is how they can best express their biblical ideals in a Western legal environment. Their basic attitude towards civil government is quiescent and compliant. They take the position advocated in Romans 13 that government is instituted by God, and for this reason they pay their taxes and exercise their democratic rights. Where they find themselves in disagreement with democratically endorsed law, they have typically campaigned for change—usually unsuccessfully.

Although the protracted dispute between Jeffreys and Elim was hard-fought, it was carried out rationally and with restraint. Open conferences were held to resolve disagreements, and decisions were made after debate and secret ballots. The debates were minuted, with the result that later historians can follow the twists and turns of discussion and the proportion of people who backed one position or another. Despite the personal charisma of Jeffreys and the genuine affection felt for him by many members of Elim, he did not act in a way that was above the law or without honour. Modern Pentecostal movements need to be aware of the problem-solving benefits of democratic debate and of the value of refraining from personal abuse, something both Jeffreys and Elim attempted to do. Although the character of Jeffreys came under the spotlight when matters reached a critical stage, there were no slanderous accusations against him or his followers. If the years from 1934 to 1962 are treated as an aberration, the progress of the Elim church continued after the dispute had subsided. Contemporary Pentecostals need to take ‘the long view’ when their disagreements escalate.

One further lesson can be taken from the Jeffreys story. Almost certainly, his eschatology predisposed him to misreading world events. Indeed, at one point in about 1950, he began a second Bible school, but then abandoned the plan once the Korean War (1950–1953) broke out; he thought the war indicated a final theological signal of the end of the age (Kay 2017, p. 411). World events in the 1930s were genuinely chilling and, once the atomic age was entered on the other side of Hiroshima in 1945, the Cold War and the potential annihilation of the human race were enough to set the pulses of even the calmest student of the Bible racing. The question for the contemporary Pentecostal movement is to decide how to approach eschatology without panic or complacency.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

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